

EDITORIAL

A RIDE THROUGH CENTRAL PARK

WEDNESDAY, July 15, 1868, dawned hot, muggy and intense, just as it had for three previous days. The *New York Herald* that day reported over one hundred persons in the city having been prostrated by the heat during the past twenty-four hours with over two hundred and fifty fatalities resulting from the excessive heat of the past three days.

In a small room in the Riverside Hotel, a woman awoke from a fitful nap and stroked the brow of her husband who lay limply across the bed. Fatigue, anxiety and sleepless nights had already left their mark upon his face and body. Fretting over a recent publication in New York depreciating his claims, he had come to the city in the midst of its worst heat wave. As the day wore on and he appeared to worsen, the woman summoned two physicians. The learned Doctors Sayre and Yale attended this poor soul and ordered leeches to his temples, cups on the spine and ice to his head.

As soon as the doctors left he announced to his wife that he knew he would soon be well if he could but get out of the hot city. He ordered his buggy to be brought around to the hotel. Where shortly before he seemed almost stuporous he now appeared to be bursting with energy. His wife trailed behind him as he literally leaped into the carriage, grasped the reins and directed the horse over to Fifth Avenue. He drove furiously northward. At 59th Street, he turned into the Park and continued north at a dangerous rate of speed. Near the upper end of the Park, his wife noted the froth at the horse's mouth. She gently touched the hands that held the reins. Whether it was this maneuver or that he noted a lake nearby, the driver suddenly stopped the carriage, leaped from the buggy and headed in the direction of the lake.

The woman later said that she did not think there was anything seriously wrong with him and so did not object to his getting out of the carriage when in the park. As a matter of fact it was several minutes before she decided to follow him and found him at the edge of the lake bathing his head. She persuaded him to get back into the buggy. He drove a short distance almost to the end of the Park. Here, he again alighted, sat down on the grass, and leaned back against a tree. He lapsed into unconsciousness. A Park policeman joined the crowd which quickly gathered at this turn of events. This official summoned an ambulance from nearby St. Luke's Hospital.

The next morning (July 16), the *New York Tribune* reported that a gentleman of Boston, Massachusetts, found insensible at the corner of 110th Street and Sixth (now Lenox) Avenue had died on the way to St. Luke's Hospital.

On the seventeenth of July, the same newspaper properly identified the gentleman in the Obituary Section: "The record of deaths by sunstroke in our issue of yesterday includes the name of William Thomas Green Morton, M.D., whose labors in introducing the anesthetic process into surgical operations have given him an eminent place among the benefactors of the human race."

This information and data were obtained from newspaper reports from the files of the New York Historical Society.

ALBERT M. BETCHER, M.D.
New York, New York